



**1. HELLO, MR. KRINGLE (3:02)**

**(Kay Kyser & His Orchestra)**

(Franklin)

Vocal chorus by Ginny Simms, Harry Babbitt, Sully Mason, Ish Kabibble.

Rec. 9/7/39 (mx. LA 1983)

**2. WINTER WEATHER (3:01)**

**(Benny Goodman & His Orchestra)**

(T. Shapiro)

Vocal chorus by Peggy Lee and Art Lund

Rec. 11/27/41 (mx. 31811)

**3. WHEN WINTER COMES (2:35)**

**(Eddy Duchin & His Orchestra)**

(I. Berlin)

Vocal chorus by Johnny MacAfee

Rec. 4/16/39 (mx. WC 2571)

**4. SLEIGH RIDE IN JULY (3:10)**

**(Les Brown & His Orchestra)**

(J. Burke/J. VanHeusen)

Vocal chorus by Gordon Drake

Rec. 11/21/44 (CO 33823)

Released 1/9/45

**5. RUDOLPH THE RED-NOSED REINDEER (2:46)**

**(Sammy Kaye & His Orchestra)**

(J. Marks)

Vocal chorus by The Kaydets

Rec. 8/22/51 (mx. CO 47039)

**6. THE CHRISTMAS SONG (CHESTNUTS ROASTING ON AN OPEN FIRE) (3:09)**

**(Les Brown & His Orchestra)**

(M. Torme/R. Wells)

Vocal chorus by Doris Day

Rec. 8/29/46 (mx. HCO 1979-1)

**7. LET IT SNOW! LET IT SNOW! LET IT SNOW! (3:10)**

**(Woody Herman & His Orchestra)**

(S. Cahn/J. Styne)

Rec. 12/10/45 (mx. CO 35501)

**8. WHEN YOU TRIM YOUR CHRISTMAS TREE (3:04)**

**(Les Brown & His Orchestra)**

(S. Burke/E. Powell/B. Carey)

Vocal chorus by Jack Haskell

Rec. 9/18/46 (mx. HCO 2042)

**9. BRAZILIAN SLEIGH BELLS (0:52)**

**(Harry James & His Orchestra)**

(P. Faith)

Rec. 6/19/50 (mx. CO 43944)

**10. WHITE CHRISTMAS (3:18)**

**(Harry James & His Orchestra)**

(I. Berlin)

Vocal chorus by Marion Morgan

Rec. 10/21/46 (mx. HCO 2114)

**11. JINGLE BELLS \* (3:19)**

**(Duke Ellington & His Orchestra)**

(arr. M. Ellington)

Rec. 6/21/62 (mx. XSM 57193)

**12. WHAT ARE YOU DOING NEW YEAR'S EVE? (3:03)**

**(Kay Kyser & His Orchestra)**

(F. Loesser/arr. Fontaine/Conlon)

Vocal chorus by Harry Babbitt & The Campus Kids

Rec. 5/22/47 (mx. HCO 2331)

\* Stereo Recording

**T**ony Bennett is fond of quoting Kurt Vonnegut's observation that the only things future historians will congratulate the human race on are its "clowning" and its jazz. The next two items we would have to add to this minute roster would, naturally enough, be Tony Bennett records and Kurt Vonnegut novels. Proceeding from there, we're next obliged to put down two further entries. The first is the wonderful warmth that nearly all humans feel at the end of every year in the succession of holidays observed by nearly all the major religions. The second is the enormous kick that those of us who are fortunate enough to have been turned on to the tradition of Great American Music get from hearing any of the great big bands of the Swing Era.

And when those two entities - the Christmas spirit and the big band sound - are combined, the results can be doubly delightful. Kay Kyser, one of the few bandleaders who fully combined sweetness, novelty and straight-ahead swing spotlights his full contingent of singers on "Hello Mr. Kringle," including handsome Harry Babbitt, gorgeous Ginny Simms, sassy Sully Mason and just plain old Ish Kabibble. "Th' Ol' Perfessor" also features Babbitt on "What Are You Doing New Year's Eve?," setting off the crooner with Rosy McHargue's warm, Jimmy Dorsey-like alto and a soft choir.

Not to mention celeste - nearly every Christmas big band record ever made includes that dainty keyboard. Although less well-stocked in terms of gimmicks, Les Brown and his Band of Renown could dish out plenty of hot licks as well as keeping things swinging in the romance department. Brown spotlights three of his singers here, among them baritones Gordon Drake on "Sleigh Ride In July" and Jack Haskell on "When You Trim Your Christmas Tree." While the first is an outstanding song, both are mainly notable for the haunting, atmospheric quality of the orchestrations, with the former featuring tenor sax great Ted Nash. Then again, Doris Day's lovely voice on "The Christmas Song" goes way beyond the merely functional - a great singer and a great band together tackling an all-time classic song.

Woody Herman's "Let it Snow," in which both the leader's engaging chops and Bill Harris's trombone phrase the melody, marks a bright and brassy bit of yuletide cheer with a solid beat and a surprisingly ominous, dissonant coda.

**M**oving from swinging jazz bands back to sweet bands, the on-the-beat phrasing of the Kaydets vocal group on "Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer" presents a perfect example of Sammy Kaye's riff staccato "swing and sway" style phrasing at its most

charming. Contrastingly, "When Winter Comes" (written by a pre-"White Christmas" Irving Berlin) showcases the 1939 Eddy Duchin band as a surprisingly modern dance orchestra, with a smooth and streamlined sound one doesn't normally associate with its more classically-inclined pianist-leader. The tasty vocal is by Johnny MacAfee, later of Harry James fame.

**S**peaking of James, two tracks by that legendary trumpeter-bandleader apply the seasonal spirit to both hot and sweet sounds, with neither "Brazilian Sleigh Bells" nor "White Christmas" being standard dance band fare. The former, a Percy Faith original, is an explosive feature for the leader's trumpet that features that horn in an explosively mariachi manner. James's "White Christmas" also sounds nothing like your conventional band foxtrot, instead being a velvety, string-laden showcase for the leader's lush chops and Marian Morgan's lovely contralto.

Benny Goodman's lovely yet still lively "Winter Weather" rates as a rarity, being one of the few BG discs to employ a vocal duo. In this case, both Peggy Lee and Art Lund would jointly become the band's two most illustrious vocal alumni.

Duke Ellington's "Jingle Bells," an adaptation credited to aide-de-camp and son Mercer, is, unbelievably, the Maestro's only Christmas record (although his treatment of The Nutcracker Suite is oftentimes employed for Christmas purposes). The Duke's men cast this overly-familiar melody in an extremely fresh mold, and as a result, even this chestnut has something new to say to us.

"To perceive Christmas through its wrapping becomes more difficult every year," the late journalist Elwyn Brooks White has written. The true feeling of Christmas more than comes through on the 12 tracks here, and, far from being obscured, it's instead magnified by some pretty spectacular wrapping. You might go so far as to say that the Christmas Spirit and the Big Band Sound go together even better than reindeer and elves.

—Will Friedwald

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